The authors investigated the sources of meaning for active seniors. Results indicated that seniors who were most active were relatively high in a wide range of sources of meaning as well as in life satisfaction in general. The importance of meaning and purpose in relation to counseling with older adults is discussed.

The United States and other nations are witnessing a rapid rise in the numbers of retired, older adults (i.e., those who are 65 years old or older). This global aging phenomenon is predicted to be a demographic transformation with “wrenching economic and social costs” (Peterson, 1999, p. 4). In considering the needs of older adults, developmental psychologists, gerontologists, counselors, and professionals who focus on long-term care are giving more attention to the role and development of personal meaning in late adulthood. The need for such perspectives is a major theme of the present article.

The greatest demands in the growing population of older adults are expected to come from the even greater proportionate growth in older individuals who describe themselves as thriving and healthy. Two thirds of adults over 65 years old describe themselves as having good or excellent health, and that percentage is expected to rise (Rubinstein, 2002b; Verbrugge, 1989). Retirees at age 62 can expect to experience another 20–30 years of challenges and transitions in which purpose and meaning take on greater importance.

There are many advantages for counselors to adopt teleological approaches that emphasize meaning and purpose in the planning, treatment, and care of older persons. A focus on meaning and purpose provides a positive, optimistic perspective that is counter to disempowering views of aging based on losses and deficits. “Bleak and pessimistic" images of growing old as a “sad and negative occurrence” have typically prevailed (Sperry, 1992, p. 387). Strategies to maintain purpose will be especially important when the transitions of old age center around losses of role or function in life, such as the

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loss of the parenting role, widowhood, chronic physical conditions, and retirement (Solis & Brink, 1992).

Gerontologists and developmental psychologists have long thought that personal meaning is a key aspect of successful aging (Birren, 1964; Butler, 1973; Erikson, 1963). This is especially true because old age is a time when one's sources of meaning are at greatest risk by virtue of the losses of personal relationships as well as the loss of career and community roles. In fact, professionals in treatment and caregiving arenas are paying more attention to the maintenance of purpose and meaning in old age. Health fields such as nursing and health education, through their focus on wellness, have also grasped the importance of perspectives that emphasize the maintenance of personal meaning throughout the life span. Hospice care programs have a primary mission of maintaining meaning in later stages of life. The Eden Alternative approach to long-term care helps individuals in nursing homes to maintain a purposeful life by reducing loneliness, helplessness, and boredom (Thomas, 1996). The successes of the leisure industry aimed at seniors, continuing education programs for the retired, and the efforts of senior centers to provide meaningful activities for individuals who have retired all demonstrate the significance of meaningful pursuits. Prager (1996) has praised

calls for more symbolic, philosophical, and heuristic orientations toward... the aging process... Though still in an embryonic stage, epistemological, idealist, or humanist models of gerontological inquiry are coming into their own, complementing and supplementing the empiricist models of the natural sciences. (p. 118)

Leder's (2002) suggestions for “conscious aging” encourage meaning and purpose in passages through later life. Counselors have a role and a responsibility in assisting individuals in late adulthood to continue to define themselves in terms of having meaningful life goals and a sense of purpose.

The present research focuses on individuals who are aging relatively successfully by maintaining highly active and socially engaged lives. We attempt to identify the sources of meaning in these individual's lives, to use sources of meaning to distinguish groups of older adults, and to explore the relationship between sources of meaning and life satisfaction.

SIGNIFICANCE AND DEFINITIONS OF MEANING

Attempts to understand meaning and purpose have come from spiritual, religious, existential, humanistic, and psychoanalytic perspectives, and a number of definitions have been proposed. In a summary of these, Wong
(1989) identified three basic components of personal meaning: cognitive, motivational, and affective. Reker and Wong (1988) defined personal meaning as "the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals and an accompanying sense of fulfillment" (p. 221). Furthermore, meaning is thought to be based on "commitments, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals and pursuits, engaging in work and enjoying success and intimate relationships" (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996, p. 60). Similarly, individuals with a high degree of personal meaning are thought to have a sense of directedness and to strive for goals that are consistent with their life purposes (Prager, 1996). Achievement of personal meaning is also recognized as being an active process in which meaning is imposed on events and each person actively constructs the meaning of his or her life (Reker & Wong, 1988). Wong (1989) has concluded that the creation and maintenance of meaning is important in successful adaptation to aging. Personal meaning serves both as a major source of life satisfaction and as a buffer against stress.

The focus on meaning and purpose in understanding the needs of older persons has strong support in theoretical literature. Erikson's (1959/1980) stage theory predicts a late life stage in which developing and maintaining personal integrity is a primary purpose in life. Tendencies to self-actualize, as described by Maslow (1968), and tendencies toward growth, as described by Rogers (1961), have been theorized to exist at all stages of life, including late adulthood. Berne's (1961) concept of a life script in transactional analysis describes an unconscious life plan that is created as a strategy for physical and psychological survival and that is followed throughout one's life. Frankl (1967) described a natural will to meaning, and a hallmark of Adlerian literature is the focus on an individual's goal striving (Ferguson, 1984). Adlerians have also suggested that meaning in late life may include self-transcendence and "community feeling," which includes a spiritual state that "signifies being at one with our life, its affirmation and the conciliation with it" (Ansbacher, 1992, p. 407; see also Hale, 1999; Penick, 2000, 2004). As described by the above theories, old age seems to be a time during which individuals who avoid major disability may have the greatest opportunity to continue their growth and development in meaning and purpose.

In addition to conceptual definitions, meaning can be operationally defined. Increased theoretical and empirical attention is being focused on measures of personal meaning and the content of goals in late life (LaPierre, Bouffard, & Bastin, 1997). One way of measuring these variables is through qualitative research (Wong, 1998a). Another method is the Motivational Induction Method, in which open-ended sentences are used to create a future orientation, allowing individuals to consider and express personal goals. Other researchers have used versions of the Life Goals Inventory,
which measures up to 16 domains of meaning such as personal achievements, health, financial situation, friends, leisure opportunities, and role in the community (Campbell, Convese, & Rodgers, 1976; Rapkin & Fischer, 1992). One of the first and now more consistently used approaches to exploring meaning and purpose in life is the assessment of the specific sources and overall strength of meaning throughout the life span (Kaufman, 1987; Prager, Bar-Tur, & Abramowici, 1997; Wong, 1998a).

**FINDINGS FROM SOURCES OF MEANING LITERATURE**

There is a general consensus about the major themes in the sources of meaning in life for individuals of all ages. Many studies point to a few major sources of meaning, which include, primarily, personal relationships, personal growth, success, altruism, hedonism, creativity, religion, and legacy (DeVogler & Ebersole, 1980; Fiske & Chiriboga, 1991; Hedlund & Birren, 1984; Klinger, 1977; Thurner, 1975; Wong, 1998b).

Most studies indicate that there seems to be little change in the strength or sources of meaning as individuals age (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Baum & Stewart, 1990; Prager, 1996); however, others, such as Ryff and Singer (1998), have documented cross-sectional declines of purpose in life in older adults as compared with middle-age (i.e., between 40 and 65 years old) and younger adults (i.e., between 18 and 40 years old). Some researchers have suggested that for the old-old (i.e., individuals who are 75 years old and older), sources of meaning may change, but the overall strength and importance of meaning do not diminish (Wong, 1989; Yalom, 1980). In the oldest-old (i.e., individuals who are older than 85 years), poorer functional abilities and relocation to institutional facilities seem to be associated with changes in the variety and strength of personal meaning resources (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Johnson, 1994). Bar-Tur and Prager's findings point to significant differences in sources and depth or "strength" of meaning between old-old individuals who live in their communities and those who live in institutions. For the oldest-old, such changes have been viewed as active reconstitution of their self-representation in order to derive a sense of control over new situations in their lives (Johnson & Barer, 1993). Similarly, Wong (2002) has described personal transformations needed to adapt successfully to transitions in old age.

If personal meaning is, indeed, important for seniors, it should be related to life satisfaction and other measures of well-being. The maintenance of life goals, particularly goals beyond those serving a self-protective or survival function, has indeed been found to be beneficial for psychological well-being in older persons (Holahan, 1988). In one study, magnitude of meaning scores was strongly and negatively correlated with depressive symptomatology (Prager et al., 1997). In exploring profiles of sources of meaning in later life, LaPierre
et al. (1997) found that goals centered on self-preservation were associated with dissatisfaction with life. Aspirations of self-development and interest in others were associated with well-being in later life. In examining a subset of the data used in the present study, Vornbrock, Owens, and Penick (2002) found no relationship between the strength and sources of meaning and a measure of life satisfaction in active older individuals. Additional research will be needed to clarify these relationships.

Appreciating gender differences in personal meaning in older individuals becomes increasingly relevant as the percentage of women relative to men rises with age. Gender differences will likely change for the current (baby boomer) cohort that has experienced a generation of exposure to feminist viewpoints. Unfortunately, gender differences are frequently not reported in research, or they are a minor emphasis. Existing evidence tends to indicate that there are minimal gender differences in total strength of meaning (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Debars, 1990; Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993; Prager, 1996). In specific measures, however, women have generally scored higher than men on scales of security, involvement, and personal relationships (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Holahan, 1988; Prager, 1996). Rapkin and Fischer (1992) found that women reported greater life satisfaction when they endorsed a wider variety of goals as important or essential to their well-being. These authors also found that older women were most concerned with maintenance of independence and environmental predictability, whereas men preferred an energetic lifestyle over stability or an easy life.

Little attention has been focused on the most well-functioning seniors. Of particular note, however, is Holahan’s (1988) examination of life goals in a cohort of individuals who were entering old age (i.e., approximately 70 years old). Using multiple regression, Holahan found that three goals scales—Autonomy, Involvement, and Achievement Motivation—significantly predicted health and psychological well-being. The exploration of patterns of purpose and meaning in those who appear to be aging “optimally” is a particular focus of our exploratory study.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Of particular interest in this study is the pattern or typology of goals and sources of meaning for relatively healthy seniors who are successfully and actively maintaining and optimizing their growth and development. We examined sources of personal meaning in two samples of active seniors. The particularly “active” qualities of these retired seniors include seeking out contact with others, having goals and purposes toward continued activity and learning, and good relative health status. Having two samples of active seniors allowed us to compare sources of meaning and life satisfaction in
individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The following specific questions guided our research.

1. How do sources of meaning in the most active seniors compare with those of other individuals of similar age who are not as active?
2. Among active seniors, how does a higher socioeconomic status (SES) group differ in pattern and strength of sources of meaning from individuals whose SES is lower?
3. What is the relationship between the strength of sources of meaning and life satisfaction in active seniors?
4. How do older men and women differ in strength of sources of meaning?

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants represented two distinct groups: retired seniors who were active at a senior center in a small rural city in Washington state (senior center group) and seniors who were involved in a university's summer continuing education program for seniors, also in Washington state (senior education group). Participants from the senior center were approached in person by research assistants and asked to participate in the study. Ninety-five percent (n = 49) of the individuals who were approached agreed to participate; 37 completed surveys were used in the study. The other group of participants was former participants of a senior education program that was designed to provide academic courses and recreation experiences to retired seniors. These individuals generally came from out of state and had resources to afford the travel and the rather substantial cost of the program. This group was approached through a mail survey process. Of 173 surveys mailed, 116 (67%) were returned; 106 were completed and were used in the study. There were 13 men (35.1%) and 24 women (64.9%) in the senior center group and 31 men (29.2%) and 75 women (70.8%) in the senior education group. There were significantly more women than men overall, \( \chi^2(1) = 21.15, p = .001, n = 143 \). The mean ages for the senior center and senior education groups were 75.68 (SD = 8.51) and 79.21 (SD = 5.75), respectively. This difference was significant, \( t(56.15) = 2.81, p = .007 \), adjusted for unequal variance. Other demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Although we were unable to perform a chi-square test of independence between income and group (50% of cells had expected values < 5), it can be seen in Table 1 that there were differences between the two groups of participants in reported income. For example, 51% of the senior center group reported an annual income of less than $15,000, whereas 52% of the senior education group was on the other end of the spectrum and reported an annual income of over $50,000. Education level was not as-
Table 1
Sample Characteristics (N = 143)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Senior Center</th>
<th>Senior Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnered</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$10,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-$14,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000-$19,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-$29,999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-$39,999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-$59,999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$50,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

assessed in the senior center group, but was likely higher in the senior education group, 94% of whom reported having some college, and 51% reported having at least a bachelor's degree.

Materials

Participants were asked to complete three pencil-and-paper instruments: a standard demographic form, the 16-item Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP; Reker & Wong, 1988), and the 13-item Life Satisfaction Index-Revised (LSI-Z; Wood, Wylie, & Sheafor, 1969). The brevity and clarity of the two instruments are advantageous in research with older individuals. The order of the presentation of the SOMP and the LSI-Z was alternated across participants.

The SOMP, developed through the efforts of Reker and Guppy (1988) and Reker and Wong (1988), is primarily a measure of sources and strength of personal, present meaning in one's life (see the first column of Table 2). It is intended to be a self-administered instrument in which respondents are asked to rate 16 sources of meaning in terms of the amount of meaning derived from each source by responding to a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by of no importance (1) and of great importance (7). Total SOMP scores from the 16 sources of meaning questions are derived by summing the responses on the 16 questions with scores ranging from 16 to 112. Reker and his colleagues reported that the internal reliability for the SOMP,
## TABLE 2
Ranking and Comparisons of the Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOMP Items*</th>
<th>Comparison of the Active Seniors and the Other Seniors on SOMP Scores, in Order of Importance</th>
<th>Comparison of the Two Groups on the SOMP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Comparison of the Active Seniors and the Other Seniors on SOMP Scores, in Order of Importance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comparison of the Two Groups on the SOMP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Comb. Wgt.</strong></td>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in personal relationships with family and friends</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling financially secure</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving human values and ideas</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting basic everyday needs</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in leisure activities</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in human rights (humanistic concerns)</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being of service to others</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving a legacy for the next generation</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving culture and tradition</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in creative activities</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing personal growth</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in hedonistic activities</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in social causes</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on next page)
### TABLE 2 (Continued)

Ranking and Comparisons of the Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOMP Items*</th>
<th>Comparison of the Active Seniors and the Other Seniors on SOMP Scores, in Order of Importance</th>
<th>Comparison of the Two Groups on the SOMP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comb. Comb. Wgt.</td>
<td>SC  SEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M       SD     M       t</td>
<td>p Lower Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being acknowledged for personal achievements</td>
<td>4.78    1.74    3.27    10.34</td>
<td>.000* 1.22 1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring material possessions in order to enjoy the good life</td>
<td>4.34    1.76    4.12    1.52</td>
<td>.130 -0.07 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in religious activities</td>
<td>4.15    2.06    3.04    6.41</td>
<td>.000* 0.77 1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90.58   10.70   79.40   12.49</td>
<td>.000* 9.41 12.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Comb. M = Combined mean of active seniors; Comb. SD = Combined standard deviation of active seniors; Wgt. M = Weighted mean from four previously conducted studies (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Prager, 1996, 1997; Reker, 1988); SC = Senior Center; SEP = Senior Education Program.

*Higher scores indicate greater importance (Reker & Wong, 1988). *Correlated for inequality of variance.

*Significant with Bonferroni correction (α = .003). **Statistically significant (α = .05).
using Cronbach's alpha, is .77. Prager (1996) has since reported a similar alpha of .78 and found 3-month test–retest validity to be .70. For the present study, the 16-item battery was used as a single homogenous scale rather than used as factorially derived subscales as has been done in other studies (Prager et al., 1997).

The LSI-Z (Wood et al., 1969) is a modification of the Life Satisfaction Index-A developed by Neugarten, Havighurst, and Tobin (1961). It is a self-report instrument and consists of 13 items originally standardized on 100 individuals who were 65 years old or older. Individuals respond to items consisting of statements regarding satisfaction with one's life, using one of three answers: agree (coded as 2), not sure (coded as 1), or disagree (coded as 0). The Total LSI-Z score is computed for each participant by summing their responses across items. Scores can range from 0 to 26. Validity and reliability coefficients for the LSI-Z have been reported at .57 and .79, respectively (Wylie, 1974). Riddick and Daniel (1984) reported a Cronbach alpha of .84 when using the index with a sample of women who were 65 or older. Test–retest reliability has been reported at .71 over an 8-week period and .52 over 3 months (Searle & Mahon, 1991, 1993) as well as .65 for an average period of 17 weeks (Searle, Mahon, Iso-Ahola, Sdrolias, & van Dyck, 1995). The LSI-Z is suitable for use with normally responsive participants when a single measure of satisfaction is desired to address long-term outlook (Maguire, 1983).

Data Coding and Handling
If a participant was missing a single item on the LSI-Z or SOMP, his or her mean response level for that scale was substituted for the missing item. Nineteen participants' data were adjusted in this way. If a participant was missing a response on more than one item on either scale, his or her data were not included in the analysis. Fourteen participants' data (8 from the senior center and 6 from the senior education group) were deleted for this reason.

RESULTS
The overall means for the LSI-Z and SOMP were 17.83 (SD = 5.56) and 90.58 (SD = 10.70), respectively. Age was not significantly correlated with either life satisfaction or total sources of meaning (both rs < .10).

How do sources of meaning in these most active seniors compare with those of other individuals of similar age who are not as active?

In order to address this question, an initial examination was made by identifying the most and least important sources of meaning in the present study. These results were compared with those of four studies in which the SOMP was used with Australian (Prager, 1996), Canadian (Reker, 1988), and Israeli populations of older adults (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Prager,
The data from those four studies were summarized using weighted means of the SOMP items and Total SOMP score. The mean SOMP scores for the present study's active seniors and the weighted means based on the other studies are presented in Table 2, columns 2-4, respectively.

The pattern of the present study's results is similar to those of the four studies mentioned previously. For instance, as was the case in each of the previously conducted studies, these active seniors considered "preserving human values and ideas" and "engaging in personal relationships with family and friends" to be among their strongest sources of meaning. Also, "engaging in personal relationships with family and friends" was rated highest for all studies, including the present one. The other two most important sources of meaning for these active seniors—"meeting basic, everyday needs" and "feeling financially secure"—were also reported as most important in at least one of the four studies. In the present study, of the least important sources of meaning, "taking part in religious activities" and "being acknowledged for personal achievements" were findings reported for other studies; however, "acquiring material possessions in order to enjoy the good life" was a least important source of meaning that was not reported for similar studies.

In comparing the two groups, the mean Total SOMP score of these active seniors was significantly higher than the weighted mean of the Total SOMP scores in the aforementioned similar studies. On individual items, the active seniors' scores were greater than the other studies' scores on 14 of 16 sources of meaning. We performed one-sample t tests to compare the scores on individual SOMP items, and, because of multiple testing, alpha was adjusted to .003. The active seniors were significantly higher on 11 of the 16 items, as shown in Table 2.

Among active seniors, how does a higher SES group (senior education program participants) differ in pattern and strength of sources of meaning from a lower SES group (senior center participants)?

In order to answer this question, an omnibus multivariate analysis of variance was performed, using SPSS 11. Participants' scores on individual items on the SOMP were entered as dependent variables with gender of participant and group (i.e., senior center or senior education) as independent variables. There was a significant difference between groups, $F(42, 78) = 2.06, p < .01, \eta^2 = .52$. There was also a significant effect of gender, $F(42, 78) = 1.56, p < .05, \eta^2 = .46$. There was no interaction between group and gender, $F(42, 78) = 1.20, p > .05, \eta^2 = .39$. An examination of these effects follows.

As can be seen in Table 2, the senior education group scored significantly higher on the mean of the Total SOMP than did the senior center group, $F(1, 141) = 14.38, p = .001, MSE = 104.72, \eta^2 = .09)$. Statistically significant differences were seen in six of the sources of meaning items, also shown in Table 2. The senior education group also scored significantly higher on LSI-Z scores ($M = 18.99, SD = 4.85$) than did the senior center
What is the relationship of the strength of sources of meaning and life satisfaction in active seniors?

The correlation between Total SOMP and LSI-Z scores did not prove to be significant ($r = .16$, $p > .05$).

How do older men and women differ in strength of sources of meaning?

Women ($M = 93.61$, $SD = 9.17$) scored significantly higher on the SOMP than did men ($M = 86.55$, $SD = 10.16$; $F(1, 127) = 13.49$, $p < .001$, $MSE = 93.41$, $\eta^2 = .09$).

DISCUSSION

Despite the cross-sectional nature of this research and limitations of this convenience sample, there are several patterns and relationships of interest in this unique group. First, there seems to have been little difference in these active seniors and others regarding the most and least important sources of meaning. Only one least important source of meaning, the lack of concern with acquiring material possessions, was not shared by participants who were less active. There are two competing explanations for this finding. On the one hand, the active seniors may have been dedicating themselves to higher level goals regarding growth and humanistic concerns. As another possible explanation, the active seniors included many of higher economic status who may be less concerned about material acquisitions. There was considerable consensus between active and less active participants, indicating that the two groups derived meaning from similar sources. Perhaps the greatest differences were evident in the strength of the sources of meaning for the active seniors.

It appears that what primarily distinguishes active seniors from less active seniors is that their greater strength of meaning and purpose are derived from a wide variety of goals and sources. Total SOMP scores for the active seniors group were significantly higher than the total weighted means of participants in the four previously mentioned studies (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Prager, 1996, 1997; Reker, 1988). In addition, the active seniors scored higher than other seniors on all SOMP items (except 2), and they were significantly higher on 11 of the 16 items. Active seniors appeared to be stronger in seeking out avenues of purpose and meaning in life. Previous research has found significant differences in breadth and depth of personal meaning between the old-old living in homes for the aged and individuals of the same age who were living in the community (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996). The differences found between these active seniors and other aging populations may represent similar differences on a continuum. Those who are more active seem to benefit in terms of overall strength in personal meaning.
The items on which active seniors did not differ from other seniors seemed to fall into two categories: (a) items of social interest (e.g., personal relationships, interest in human rights, and values) and (b) items reflecting basic needs (e.g., material possessions and leisure). Given the relatively high scores on items reflecting social interest, these categories appear to be universally endorsed as strong sources of meaning.

When the differences between the two groups of active seniors were examined, the senior education group appeared to have a higher SES than the senior center participants. Although these data could not be statistically analyzed, differences in both income and education are highly likely. In comparing the two active senior groups, the senior education sample scored higher than the senior center sample on Total SOMP scores. In addition, they scored higher on all 16 items on the SOMP, significantly so for 6 items: leisure, creativity, achievement, personal growth, social causes, and financial security. Thus, it appears that higher SES factors allow greater access to and opportunity for sources of meaning. These findings also suggest possible areas of emphasis for seniors who are able to seek out continued growth and purpose in life.

The lack of relationship between Total SOMP and Total LSI-Z scores is somewhat surprising and seems to indicate that personal meaning does not serve as a major source of life satisfaction and well-being. Purpose in life and personal growth have consistently been shown to have a relationship with income and education (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; LaPierre et al., 1997). Given the relatively high scores on both the SOMP and the LSI-Z, a ceiling effect and restriction in range in the SOMP for the highly active seniors represented in this sample may have precluded finding a relationship. Other measures of well-being focusing on present or more immediate life satisfaction may prove to be more closely related to the most recent adaptations in sources of meaning. Further research regarding the importance of meaning and purpose in old age should carefully consider the temporal aspects and complex interweaving of physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions when selecting instruments to measure life satisfaction and well-being.

Although not a major question of this study, there was no relationship between age and Total SOMP or Total LSI-Z scores. This suggests continuity and stability in strength of meaning over time and should be encouraging for anyone contemplating growing older. It appears that the overall strength and importance of meaning do not diminish as individuals age. Although it is difficult to generalize this finding to the general population because of the focus on active older adults, these results are supported by similar findings in the literature (Bar-Tur & Prager, 1996; Baum & Stewart, 1990; Prager, 1996). Women scored significantly higher than men on Total SOMP scores, which might indicate that the greater social orienta-
tion of women may give them greater flexibility in maintaining meaningful lives in late life.

Several modifications in research design could strengthen this line of inquiry in future research. Bar-Tur and Prager (1996) have proposed factors in a hierarchy from "lower" levels of individualistic/materialistic orientations to 'higher' levels of collective/humanistic meaning orientations" (p. 63). The use of larger data sets will allow exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of themes in late-life meaning sources. The Adlerian concept of social interest has been proposed as a particularly relevant factor among sources of meaning for those in old age (Ansbacher, 1992; Hale, 1999; Penick, 2002, 2004). Bee and Bjorklund (2000) and Kegan (1982) have predicted that the development of meaning systems over adulthood leads to growth through "stages" that alternate from desires to be connected and integrated with others to stages representing desire for differentiation, independence from others, and attention to self. In exploring these theories, longitudinal methods are needed to provide the optimal understanding of the development of sources of meaning in late life. In addition, the sample of convenience used in this research resulted in unequal group sizes. Ideally, future studies will use more comparable sample sizes in order to give equal weight to the conditions in the statistical analysis and to minimize the effects of violating the distributional assumptions of the analyses used.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

To assist seniors in the successful adaptation to aging, counselors can integrate efforts to help older individuals in continuing the discovery and creation of meaning. Our research suggests that counselors should support older persons in a wide variety of pursuits toward meaning. Some aspects may be more available for intervention. Wong (1989) has suggested six areas of focus to enhance meaning in seniors' lives: (a) creative work, (b) meaningful relationships, (c) self-transcendence, (d) simple pleasures in life, (e) hope for the future, and (f) life review. The therapeutic use of life review as a clinical technique has gained increasing support as a means to settle unresolved tensions and aid in the development of self-concept (Knight, 1996; Molinari, 1999; Rubinstein, 2002a). Used in this way, life review goes beyond the more basic use of reminiscence and simple review of the past. It uses the past to contribute to present-day identity, and the inclusion of a future component in the process of life review (Whitbourne, 1985) can aid in further developing personal meaning and self-identity in later life.

As a source of meaning, social engagement is an important goal for counselors; however, in considering the unique needs and desires of elderly and retired individuals, counselors can expect a shift and broadening of social interest domains (Penick, 2004). This can be viewed as the continuation of
a process of decentration throughout the life span leading to less human-focused and more spiritually focused goals. Consequently, counselors need to be prepared to recognize and support changes in sources of meaning involving self-transcendence and contribution to more spiritually broad aspects, such as feeling of union and harmony with culture, the world, and the universe.

REFERENCES


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